

Carl Schurz Park Conservancy | Spring 2021

Park Notes

Nature's Vital Role

The Power of Our Park to Improve
Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing

Chairperson's Letter

It has been proven. Nature makes us happier, healthier, and more creative.

But, after this past year, I think we might all agree that it can also be a virtual life saver or, at the very least, help keep us sound.

Park usage has been at an all time high as the outdoors provides one of the safest places in which to socialize, recreate, teach and learn. I think it is safe to say that our park has been critically important to the countless folks using it.

In fact, we are hearing the same sentiment expressed again and again—"We don't know how we would manage without Carl Schurz Park—it has been our sanctuary." Clearly, never has the value of greenspace been more evident.

In this edition of Park Notes, we are pleased to illustrate why the park has such magnetic appeal and why one might consider it to be a necessary part of healthy urban living.

Enjoy!



Judy Howard
Chair, Board of Directors



Volunteer Gardeners Sustained Park in Spring 2020

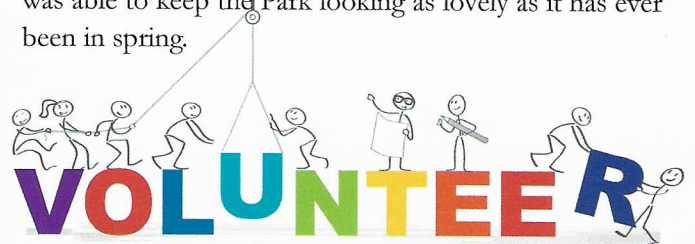
Some believe that springtime is the most beautiful season in Carl Schurz Park. They welcome the arrays of bright tulips and Spanish Bluebells, the magnolia blossoms along the Esplanade, and the annual blooming of the Cherry Tree Allee.

Carl Schurz Park Conservancy, however, knows that spring is also the most demanding time of the year, with multiple annual tasks that challenge even the Conservancy's full-time horticulturist and part-time assistant. This past spring, the Spring of 2020, was the most challenging year of all. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, no Conservancy staff was allowed to be onsite in the Park from mid-March to early June.

The restrictions on staff travel meant that nobody would be there to remove fallen limbs and cut back damaged branches; prune unruly trees and bushes; cut down perennials and clean up flower beds; rake up winter debris; clean and mulch paths; distribute hoses; turn over the mulch pile; fill-in holes and re-seed lawns; clean around drains; plant annuals; and weed, weed, weed.

In response to the critical need for springtime maintenance, a group of Volunteer CSPC Zone Gardeners offered to fill in for staff. A self-organized group, they held weekly Zoom meetings to determine priorities and assign responsibilities, and they arranged a weekly work morning for group tasks. From mid-March and even throughout the summer, this group provided the support necessary to maintain the Park during an especially demanding time.

The Conservancy has always been proud of its volunteers, without whom CSP would be a different place. The Spring 2020 group exemplifies their dedication and their value to the Park. With their help the Conservancy was able to keep the Park looking as lovely as it has ever been in spring.



Our Park, a Source of Health and Wellbeing

Diantha Schull
Board Secretary

In recent years, Carl Schurz Park Conservancy has been working hard to apply best practices in environmental conservation, with acute awareness of the value of the park as a habitat for native species, a source of clean air, and as part of a web of natural spaces that strengthen the city's capacity to respond to climate change. With new data from researchers who are examining the connections between health and nature, we are becoming equally aware of—what some of us have felt instinctively—the power of our park to improve physical health and mental well-being.

Remarkably, Frederick Law Olmsted, considered to be the father of American landscape architecture, wrote in 1865, that viewing nature “employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the



effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system.” Now, in fact, it has been proven—green spaces have curative effects.

Specialists at the Yale School of Environmental Management report:

“A growing body of research points to the beneficial effects that expo-

sure to the natural world has on health, reducing stress, stimulating the immune system, and promoting healing.” (1)

New research is taking place around the globe. Doctors at the University of Essex in the U.K. found that people who spend at least two hours a week in nature

report overall better health and well-being than those who don't experience nature at all. Scientists in Denmark found that children who lived in neighborhoods with more green space had a reduced risk of depression and other psychiatric disorders later in life. And Canada
... continued on page 4

ENERGY GOALS CARDIO RUN WELLNESS FOCUS RESOLUTION SPORT

Health & Wellbeing , continued from page 3

dian researcher Dr. Elizabeth Nisbet states:

“You can boost your mood just by walking in nature, even in urban nature. And the sense of connection you have with the natural world seems to contribute to happiness even when you’re not physically immersed in nature.”
(2)

The research confirms the many physical benefits of interacting with nature, from reducing obesity to increasing overall fitness. These benefits are matched by improvements in mental outlook. Studies are showing that time in nature lowers anxiety, improves mood, increases self-esteem, and reduces the negative effects of loneliness and social isolation. According to Dr. Marc Berman of the University of Chicago:

“Imagine a therapy that had no known side effects, was readily available, and could improve your cognitive functioning at zero cost. Such a therapy has been known to philosophers, writers, and laypeople alike: interacting with nature. Many have suspected that nature can promote improved cognitive functioning and overall well-being, and these effects have recently been documented.” (3)

This is an exciting time for us at Carl Schurz Park Conservancy as the importance of what we do every day to sustain the park becomes ever clearer. Armed with significant data on nature-health connections, we continue to work with vigor to ensure that park users find clean, green, and safe spaces for recreation, meditation, social interaction, and learning.

This past year especially, people sought out the park as an alternative to their own four walls, offering greenery and beauty, space for exercise, and safe social connections. Over and over visitors told us that the park was essential in helping them to overcome anxiety and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Not surprisingly, their testimonials correlate with the emerging research:



“I have successfully fought cancer twice and believe that is due to being able to walk peacefully every day in the open air, along the Esplanade and around the gardens of Carl Schurz Park. Actually, I don’t think I would be here without having had my dose of Carl Schurz Park each day.”

“We are doing our best and loving Carl Schurz in all its splendor. It has been our safe place. Our sanctuary.”

“The Park makes me feel grounded. The trees and the open sky have helped me cope with frustration and fear during this surreal time.”

“I have lived across from this park for 17 years, but until now I had not been free to appreciate all that it offers to me and to others. It has helped to keep me sane and to recover my health.”

We have always known instinctively that Carl Schurz Park is vital to the neighborhood. The quiet, the beauty, the safety, the space for communal or ceremonial activities, the opportunities for recreation, the views of the water and the horizon beyond are some of the qualities that draw people consciously or subconsciously to the park. What we now know for certain is that those very qualities can affect every aspect of one’s life. Additionally, access to parks can improve health outcomes for entire neighborhoods and are the key to a healthy community.

As new scholarship illuminates the beneficial links between exposure to nature and improvements in human health, it affirms the importance of the Conservancy. We are proud to be stewards of this wonderful greenspace and prouder still to sustain a park which will, in turn, help to ensure a healthier Upper East Side.

References:

1. Robbins, Jim. Ecopsychology: How Immersion in Nature Benefits Your Health. Yale Environment 360. Jan. 2020. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/ecopsychology-how-immersion-in-nature-benefits-your-health>
2. Nisbet, Elizabeth. Nurtured by Nature. Monitor on Psychology. Vol. 51, No. 3. American Psychology Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>
3. Berman, Marc et al. The Cognitive Benefits of Interacting with Nature. Psychological Science. Vol 19, No 12. 2008. Am Ass for Psychological Science. https://psych.utah.edu/_resources/documents/psych4130/The%20Cognitive%20Benefits%20of%20Interacting%20with%20Nature.pdf

Unpredictable: The Damaging Effects of Hurricane Isaias

Banford Weissmann

Master Gardener

Every storm that comes through the park leaves its mark. Sometimes, only those of us working in the gardens notice the changes. Other times, the loss is obvious to the whole community. Some of you may recall when the iconic Linden standing at the crest of the North Lawn was ripped out of the ground during Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Since then, many storms have barreled through the park, altering its canopy.

The most recent storm to hit the park was Hurricane Isaias. It was one of the most damaging storms we have ever had, even though it had been downgraded to a tropical storm by the time it arrived in New York. You could trace the squall's route through our park by the pattern of damage sustained in its wake. It jumped onto the promenade at about 87th Street and worked its way south, down the Polly Gordon Walk exiting at E. 84th. We lost 9 trees that day, with others that were so damaged they later had to be cut down.

Because NYC's Forestry Department was so overwhelmed after the storm, the Conservancy brought



One of the many damaged trees due to Hurricane Isaias

Photo by: Jeffrey B. Evans

in Bartlett Tree Service to remove dangerous hanging limbs. They were also able to salvage two trees by setting up stakes and straps to support them until they can stand on their own in a few years. The horticultural staff and gardening volunteers spent several days sawing and cleaning up branches so that the Parks Department could haul them away.

Trees that seem to be most vulnerable to storms are Lindens. They have dense canopies, so if leaves are still present when a storm comes through, the wind has more leverage to do dam-

age. Locust trees are another common victim because of their brittle branches. Occasionally, a tree that appears sturdy on the outside will be destroyed because of what is going on inside the trunk – internal weakness due to disease or infestation. One of our London Plane trees on the southern end of the hockey court was snapped in half during Isaias, even though there was no outward indication of vulnerability.

Because storm damage is unpredictable and broken or falling limbs are potentially a hazard, the Conservancy advises everyone

to stay away from the park during – and just after – storms. Isaias alone gave us more than 9 reasons. While, the city's Parks and Forestry Departments are responsible for removing damaged trees, the Conservancy can restore the canopy by planting new ones. It is certainly sad to lose any tree, but where there is loss, there is opportunity. In the coming months you will see some beautiful new trees being planted in our park's landscape – ones that are native, provide benefits for our birds and pollinators, and create cool shade for all park visitors.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT

Carl Schurz Park Conservancy is grateful to all those who made a contribution between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020. Without your vital support, our efforts at improving the park would be greatly diminished.

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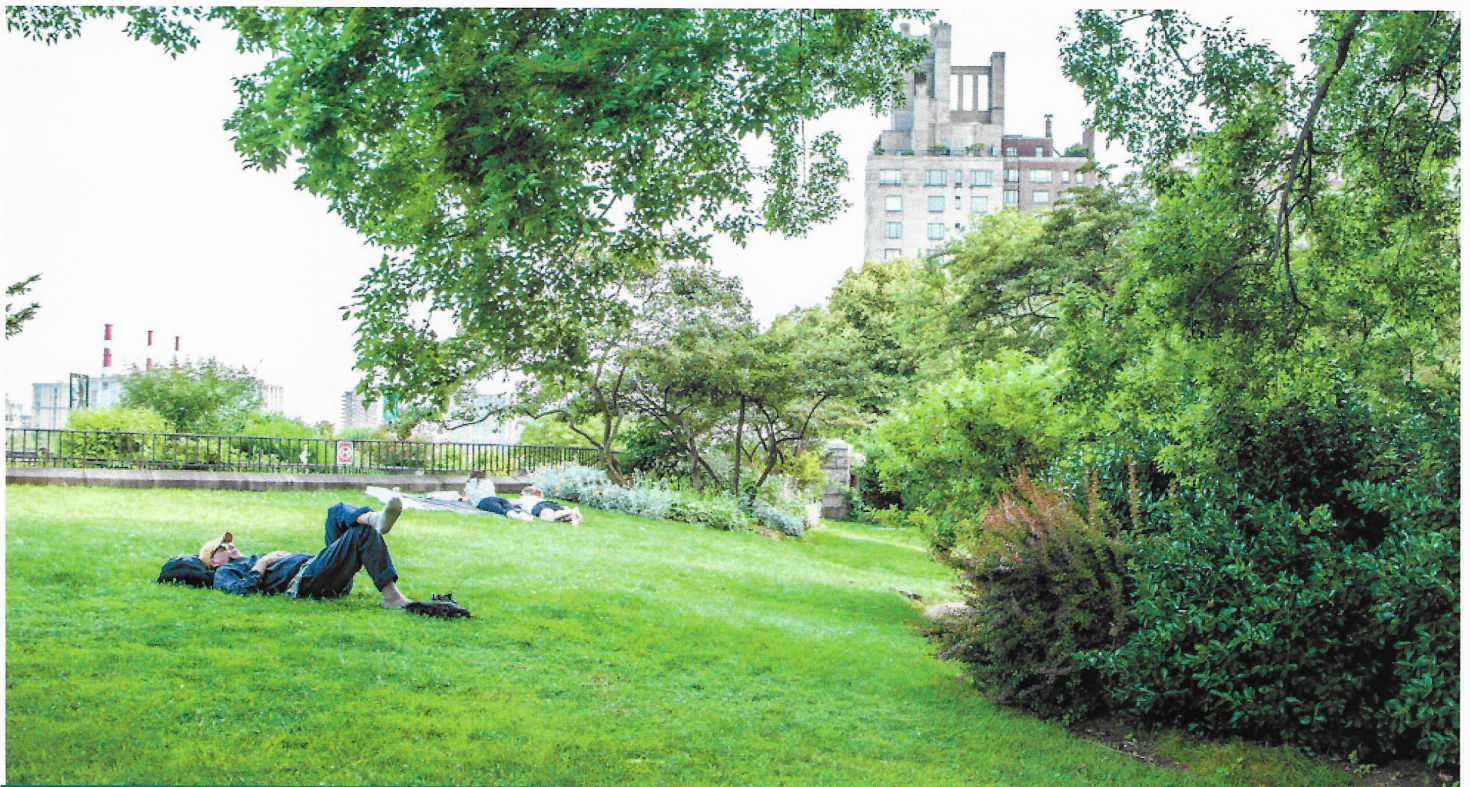
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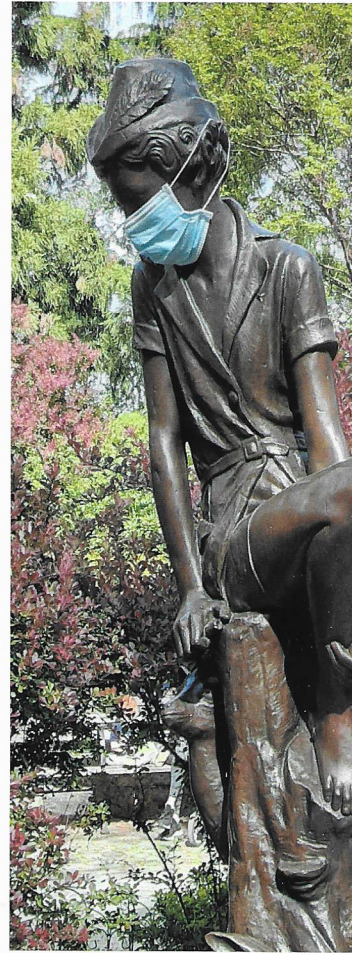
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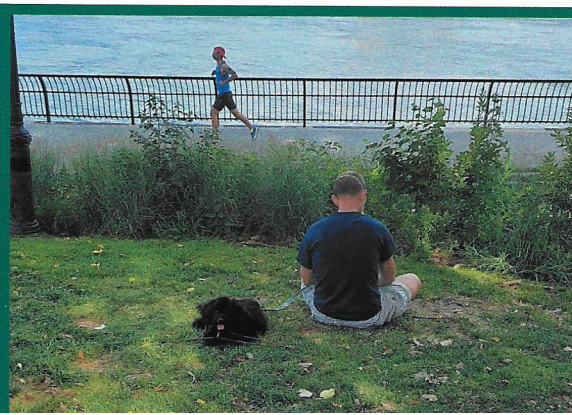
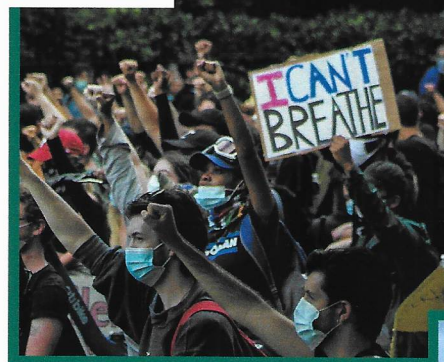
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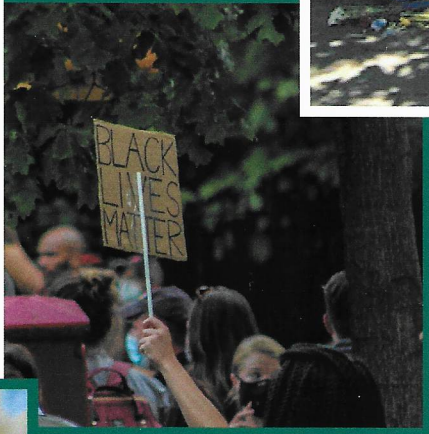
"This is not a place for violence or anger. We can be peaceful under these trees. We can celebrate safely."

-A local grandmother celebrating Juneteenth

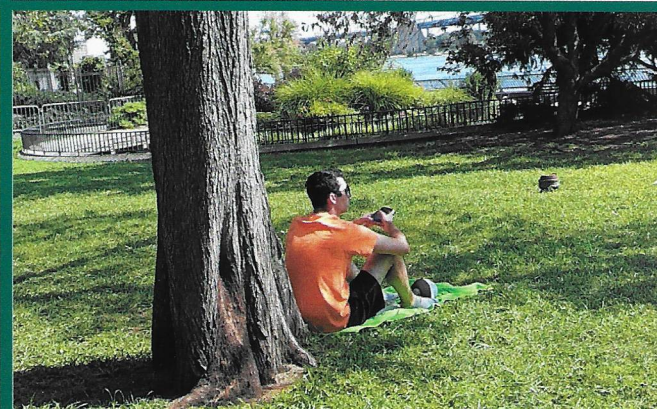


Schurz Park Conservancy

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"Carl Schurz Park gives me hope."



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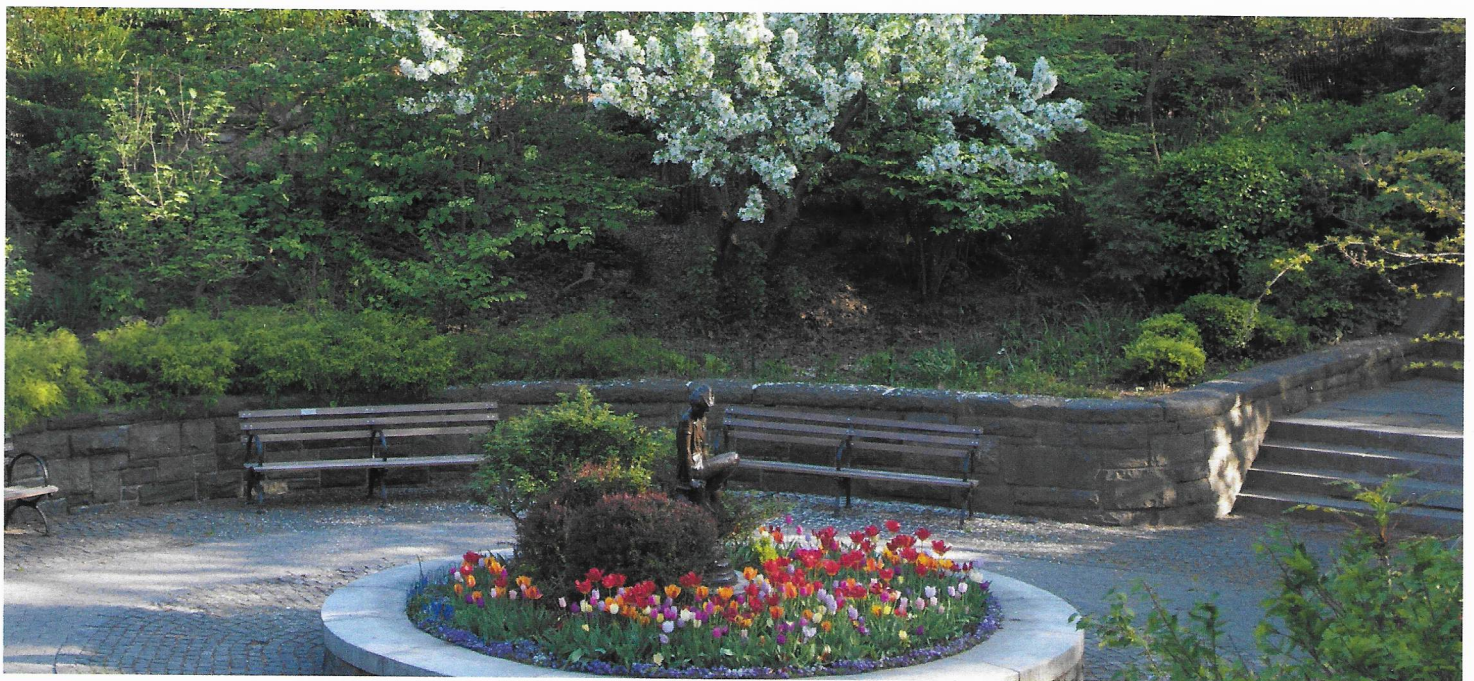
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*Our Volunteers
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Carl Schurz Park is for the Birds!

Banford Weissmann

Master Gardener

Birding, the hottest new pandemic-related pastime, has come to the park in a big way this year. In fact, Carl Schurz Park is now a designated Hotspot on Cornell's popular eBird app - at least 135 bird species have been spotted in our park. Year-round residents include cardinals, robins, blue jays, mockingbirds, catbirds, starlings and several different types of sparrows. And just this year, we added many new birds to our roster of regulars: chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, thrushes, wrens and titmice. Red-tailed hawks are common sightings, partially due to the plentiful stock of pigeons that they like to hunt.

You may have heard about the two unusual birds that over-wintered in the park – the Western Tanager and Orange-Crowned Warbler. They were stranded here after one of the major winter storms. Immediately, the Conservancy sprang into action to find out how to help them survive. Lucie

Young, who writes our website's What's in Flight? feature, contacted Paul Sweet at the American Museum of Natural History to help us come up with a plan to take care of them. The Conservancy reached out to Gabriel Willow, who leads our bird tours during the biannual migration season, to get his thoughts on the best course of action.

As a result, the Conservancy set up a series of bird feeders over by the Catbird Playground. Some of the feeders hold suet, some hold apple and orange halves. A feed log strung up between two trees contains fruit, seeds, nuts and worms. The foods are particular to the diets of these guest birds, but the feeders have become popular places to dine with many of our regulars.

Naturally, squirrels also enjoy all that food – especially the feed log. It's amusing - and frustrating - to see them try to circumvent various barriers that have been



erected to thwart them. One has to admire their persistence.

Jay Zemann, our resident birder, helps us keep track of bird activity on a regular basis and lets us know who he sees and what they are eating. He sourced the feed log from, of all places, a church supply company in Minnesota. He informs us when squirrels have breached the blockade and it's time to hang a new log. Caring for the birds has been a true team effort.

For their own sakes, we hope the warbler and the tanager eventually move on down the road to join their relatives. But the Conservancy continues to support our neighborhood birds by planting the native plants and trees that provide fruit, nuts and seeds they like to eat. Our improved maintenance practices support a multitude of insects that provide a crucial source of protein for the birds, particularly those that migrate through in the spring and fall.

Our burgeoning avian population shows us that, to them, Carl Schurz Park is for the birds.

Left: CSP's famous inhabitant this winter, the Western Tanager.

Photo and drawing by: Jay Zemann

Above: Orange Crowned Warbler.

Photo by: Gig Palileo

Right: Hermit Thrush

Photo by: Lucie Young



Less Flooding: Erosion Mitigation Takes Hold

Breeana George
Horticulturist

If you have been to Carl Schurz Park after a heavy rainstorm you may have noticed a thick layer of slippery, wet soil deposited in front of the Hoop Garden at 86th Street. This is due to the run-off from the surrounding steeply sloped areas where the grass has been destroyed.

We have a wonderfully unique park with beautiful topography and winding paths. However, with this park design comes landscape issues that have weighed heavily on us all.

For park goers it can be treacherous after a heavy rain, having to avoid flooded, muddy areas. For gardeners and volunteers, it's an urgent call for clean-up. This involves scraping the mud from our blue stone and carting hundreds of heavy buckets-full, back up to the tops of our slopes.

The Conservancy has always taken steps to address erosion issues. Throughout the park, we have used cribbing logs which are large tree limbs terraced into sloping areas and secured with stakes. The logs break down over

a long period of time adding nutrients and providing a habitat for organisms and fungi to thrive. However, this conventional method will not work on our lawn areas due to the potential trip hazard.

Our newest effort to control lawn erosion comes in the form of coir logs. Coir logs are made of soft coconut fibers which biodegrade over many years. They are effective in holding the soil in place without the potential for tripping. They are also great for filtering and slowing down fast-moving water.

In addition to the coir logs, we add soil stabilizing jute matting, made of hand spun coir, beneath. Jute matting is essentially a biodegradable netted soil blanket. As a final step we plant ground cover throughout the jute netting which helps to further rehabilitate the soil and hold it in place.

So far, we have seen a marked improvement using this solution for erosion control on our steepest slopes. You can see the coir logs at work on the susceptible lawn areas surrounding the Hoop display garden. Just look for the tan fuzzy logs peaking above the soil line!



**Top: Erosion mitigation in-progress; Middle: New coir logs
Bottom: An example of cribbing logs**

Photos by: Breeana George

CSPCC Events

Due to the
COVID-19 pandemic
all events are cancelled.

We look forward to
seeing you all in 2022.

Stay updated at:
www.carlschurzparknyc.org





Photo by: Jay Zemann

HOW TO DONATE

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If your employer matches gifts, please follow their matching gift protocol to initiate the match; we will complete the process to multiply your support.

Planned Giving

Please consider including the Conservancy as a beneficiary of your estate by joining our Peter Pan Society. You may call our office to speak with us.

Stock Gifts

For instructions on how to donate stock to CSPC, please call or e-mail our office.

Carl Schurz Park Conservancy Mission Statement

The mission of Carl Schurz Park Conservancy is to restore and beautify Carl Schurz Park, complementing the efforts of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Our goal is to enhance the public's enjoyment and involvement in the Park. The Conservancy organizes volunteers to execute its projects and sponsors community events that are open to all.

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